



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

19th District News

Summer 2001



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Dear Friends:

Decisions, decisions.

People might not always like it, but most everyone agrees that making decisions is a big part of what it means to be a grown-up. Families and businesses most every day have to figure out the best way to get what they want. That's just how it is in the real world. Dads and moms and business leaders have to look at a question or problem and decide what they should do to overcome it.

Government shouldn't be any different. The Legislature is just a bunch of people trying to figure out how to overcome things.

People. What goes on in any family or in any business or in any state legislature is all about people. This year in the House of Representatives and the Senate, we didn't get along very well all the time. **But the two of us believe the 2001 Legislative Session nonetheless tackled issues that really mean something for people – that really matter for families, including these subjects:**

- **Child and family safety** is something you can't put a price on. It never goes out of style. And it's always the right thing to do.
- Peace of mind for Washingtonians is advanced in a new law to make sure **your bills won't be run up illegally if someone gets their hands on your personal financial information.**
- Another bill this year aims to make sure owners of small forestland get **a fairer deal in the state's salmon-recovery work.**
- We reached agreement on **a new state budget that does stay under the spending limit and that does not increase any taxes.**

Yes, your 19th District News report says it — and we mean it — every time: We appreciate your interest in the Legislature. And again, please give us a call or write us a note whenever you'd like to tell us what you think.

Best wishes,

Brian Hatfield
State Representative
19th Legislative District

Mark Doumit
State Representative
19th Legislative District

◆ **Child safety:** **One family's tragedy** **could prevent other losses**

Earlier this year, Raedyn and Erik Grassest of Wahkiakum County lost their infant daughter, Riley Nichole, when a portable crib collapsed and suffocated the little girl.

Riley's parents didn't know the crib had been recalled by the manufacturer. The crib was loaned to them by a friend of the family, who also had no idea it was recalled.

They are a very safety-conscious family, and they would never allow this kind of crib in their house if they knew it was recalled. That's why it's so important for us to get this information out to the public as much as we can.

Within a few weeks of the tragic accident, the same type of crib was found in other Southwest Washington homes, including one in a daycare facility in Cowlitz County. There are probably a lot of similar products still in use.



*The **health and safety** of our kids, grandkids, friends and neighbors is so very important.*

◆ **Public-awareness heightened**

This legislative session, we passed and the governor signed a new law directing the Department of Health to heighten public-awareness of recalled cribs and other products used by infants and children. It only makes sense to spread the word as far and as wide as we can.

This information has to get out about a product that threatens anyone's health and safety – especially the health and safety of kids.

The legislation directs the Department of Health to make a concerted effort to inform parents, foster parents, caregivers, child-care facilities, children's clothing stores, and other organizations that serve and work with children and their families.

◆ **Identity thieves:** **Idea is OK'd to pull in** **crooks who pilfer names**

Identity theft, an old crime that the Internet can give new and even more sinister meaning, is targeted in legislation also signed into Washington law this legislative session.

The new law will help protect Washington citizens from a crime that, unfortunately, occurs more frequently every year.

This policy tells people who steal the identity of another person — and then use it for financially nightmarish purposes — that they face stiff, unflinching penalties for their unlawful activity. **Identity theft won't be tolerated – and it will be dealt with severely.**

Identity thieves can get their hands on other people's personal information by the old-fashioned way of going through details in the victim's garbage – or by the modern and equally despicable way of “going through” details on the Internet.

More than half a million Americans were victimized last year. Washington has the dubious distinction of a top-10 ranking in per-capita cases.

Tough penalties in the Criminal Profiteering Act, thanks to terms of the new state law, can now be applied to persons who steal someone else's identity.

◆ **Businesses will help out**

Businesses will help victims deal with potential and actual cases of identity theft, and courts can order the correction of a victim's personal financial details and other records.

Also, collection agencies are restricted in terms of contacting victims for information about debts run up by identity thieves. Instead, a victim is required simply to provide proof that a debt is in fact the result of the theft of his or her personal information.

Identity thieves can now be prosecuted as class B felons if their thievery amounts to \$1,500 or more. (The crime of identity theft includes credit, property, or services obtained as a result of stealing someone else's personal information.)

In this era when more of our personal information is out there in computer systems, it's fundamental that we take steps to discourage — and, if need be, punish — identity theft.

The legislation won support from citizens, businesses, and the attorney general.

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◆ Small forestland: Landowners would receive more fire protection and support

It's true that legislative agreement on a new budget and a few other items was elusive this legislative session. But it's also true that some good ideas are becoming the law of the state.

In addition to the measures addressed elsewhere in this edition of your *19th District News*, here are two other items that serve as good examples of successes we did achieve this year.

One bill directs that the cost of providing fire protection for forestland must be shared by landowners and the state. Recommendations from a study done four years ago — a study pointing out that our state contributes less than other states to the cost of providing fire protection — are reflected in the new law.

The state will start paying an equitable percentage with the landowners for adequate fire protection. This bill re-emphasizes the state's intent to have a much larger fire-protection program to prevent forest fires. Better-trained fire crews — and more of them — and better equipment for fighting forest fires are ensured in the new law.

We need to strengthen our system to keep small forest fires from becoming big forest fires. The drought we're experiencing will only make this year's forest-fire season tougher than usual.

The bill's supporters included the Washington Forest Protection Association and the Washington Association of Fire Chiefs.

◆ Legislation highlights fairness

Another bill directs that compensation for small-forest landowners in the riparian-easement program will be enhanced by requiring the state to pay for the reimbursement program for the lost value of a landowner's timber. **That's the fair thing to do.**

A few years ago, we passed the Forest and Fish legislation to help keep landowners in business. We need to find better ways to help all forest landowners remain profitable. We need to encourage people to stay in natural-resource businesses.

The bill's supporters included the Washington Farm Forest Association, the Washington Farm Forestry Association, the Department of Natural Resources, and many other concerned citizens and organizations in our state.

◆ State budget: Balance is emphasized as we address serious challenges

The Legislature knew going into this year's session that writing a new state budget for the 2001-2003 budget period wasn't going to be easy.

No less than the rest of the nation, our state faces mounting health-care costs, for one thing — and the drought, the energy crunch, and caseload-increases have put the squeeze on already-diminished funds. We finally found an acceptable compromise, though, on a plan that rejects any tax increases, includes a reasonable reserve fund, and stays under the spending limit.

This new budget — which is actually the sole responsibility mandated by state law for the Legislature — includes **strong funding to continue the Better Schools Program and the Reading Corps emphasis in our classrooms.** We've also directed **an appropriate level of funds toward the Basic Health Program to make sure needy families — especially their children — don't miss important health care.** Teachers — as directed in citizen-approved initiatives last year — and other public employees receive responsible cost-of-living raises.



*Very few responsibilities rank with the education we provide for young people — **whether it's in public or private schools, or in our own homes.***

You know that we've spent the past several years working to secure balance in any new shoreline regulations. (We talk a little more about that specific issue in another part of this publication.) Brian this year sought a shorelines amendment that would go a long way toward reaching a fair compromise. But our GOP colleagues balked — and so he withdrew the amendment so the budget could move forward and finally win approval.



*The new budget includes **health-care money to make sure the neediest Washington citizens aren't left wanting.***

As we write this newsletter in early-July, the governor has promised to call us back into special session later this month to adopt a new transportation budget. We're still striving for agreement on a revenue source to fund needed highway and other transportation work in Southwest Washington and the rest of the state.

◆ **Consumer boost:** **New law sticks up for disabled Washingtonians**

Another new Washington law seeks greater respect for the rights of the citizens of our state, very much including long-term care for disabled citizens.

The idea behind this new policy is to ensure that consumers aren't shortchanged if and when another company purchases the consumer's original settlement-benefits package.

"Structured settlements" in large tort claims are targeted in the measure. Settlements in this type of claim usually involve the payment of a lump sum, followed by smaller payments over time.

The original beneficiary sometimes transfers his or her rights for subsequent payments to a third party, which then provides a single, lump-sum payment to the original beneficiary. The legislation increases protection for the rights of an original beneficiary.

Fifteen other states already provide the consumer protection illustrated in our bipartisan Structured Settlement Protection Act.

Terms of this law direct that a settlement can't be transferred from the original beneficiary to a third entity until the proposed transfer is checked thoroughly either in administrative proceedings or in court. **Insurance-payees will be treated fairly and can make decisions based on facts.**

◆ **Emergency 911:** **Successful measure seeks better services in rural areas**

Better emergency-911 service in rural Washington specifically — and a more efficient 911 system throughout the state generally — is targeted in another new Washington law endorsed and signed.

Funding for the emergency system is strengthened for greater coordination of services. The state enhanced-911 coordinator will work to make sure each of our state's 39 counties receives the same high level of emergency service. The statewide operation and management of the enhanced 911 system will create more efficient operations. We're also seeking greater local control for county 911 operations.

Pacific County Sheriff John Didion and Pacific County Commissioner Jon Kaino, who is also a member of the State Emergency 911 Advisory Board, were instrumental in winning support for this legislation.

The measure is intended to make sure local systems can maintain an appropriate staffing level. Make no mistake about it: Local systems in rural Washington are just as important as anywhere else.

◆ ***Equal treatment for all***

No region of Washington should have inadequate emergency service.

Smaller counties might need a hand buying equipment to provide better service. The more efficient use of revenue directed in this legislation is meant to help these counties be more effective in answering emergencies.

Washington voters 10 years ago approved a tax to help pay for 911 services.

The legislation will see to it that more revenue goes toward bringing every local 911 system up to the level of the best in the state.



*Those of us who call rural and small-town Washington home deserve the **same emergency services** as anyone else.*

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◆ **Salmon-recovery: Hatchery strategy will help fish get back up to par**

A new law of Washington directs the Department of Fish & Wildlife to develop rules allowing more hatchery salmon to spawn. **We worked with our colleagues from across the political aisle to steer a bill through the Legislature to secure support for this plan – and then convince the governor to not veto the key parts of the bill.**

The thing is: We're spending a lot of money on salmon-recovery, and yet we kill thousands of returning fish without letting their spawn reach maturity. We're letting thousands of returning fish just go to waste – we kill them without letting them spawn. Since we have such drastically depleted stocks, why not let more of the returning fish spawn naturally when it is appropriate and will not damage wild runs?

Provisions are in the legislation to maintain protection against the spread of aquacultural diseases. Every year, the Department of Fish & Wildlife will conduct workshops around the state to help local volunteers working to save threatened and endangered fish.

The Northwest Marine Trade Association, the state Salmon Recovery Board, fish-enhancement groups, and recreational and commercial-fishing interests supported this bill.

◆ **Disappointments: House GOP curbs fair ideas for shorelines, primary elections**

Unfortunately, a pair of ideas we advanced this session — one of them to emphasize fairness in the development of any new shoreline rules and the other to keep our state's free and independent system of primary elections — both fell victim to what can only be called stonewalling by our House Republican colleagues.

Our GOP colleagues in the House — spurred on by some members of the big-business community — refused to seriously consider a common-sense plan for shorelines. We wanted to write a new state law to force the Department of Ecology (and any other agency) to adopt only policies that work for rural Washington. In fact, we supported a measure that had bipartisan co-sponsors – and received an almost-equal number of votes from Senate Democrats as from Senate Republicans.

The legislation was also supported by the state Farm Bureau.

This shorelines plan recognized that regulations set by the Department of Ecology are too strict, will cost too much money, and aren't needed in rural counties already planning for shorelines and growth.

Further, supporters of this bill emphasized that full funding is needed to help local governments that want to plan under the new guidelines.

But as we said, the Republican leadership in the House and the leaders of the Building Industry Association of Washington — against the wishes of some rural members of that very association — put the kibosh on this reasonable plan to rein in the department.



Opposition from our colleagues across the aisle kept primary-election legislation from getting through the process this year.

◆ **Supremes spur action – almost**

The U.S. Supreme Court last year threw out California's blanket-primary system – a system very similar to the one we've used here in Washington since the 1930s.

We knew before session that we had to install a new system, or the court would step in and install one for us. Most legislators and most members of the public agree that a court-imposed system is not acceptable.

When you go to the polls in the primary election (or the general election or whenever), you should be able to vote for whomever you want.

No, we don't have anything against political parties. They're a fine way for a lot of people to get their points across. But they shouldn't be dictating the primary-election candidates for whom we get to vote.

We advanced a plan aimed at guaranteeing primary-polling-place freedom and choice for Washingtonians. For some reason, however, the House Republican leadership just said "No" to our proposal.

◆ **Toll-free call:**
Ring up the WTAP
for phone-bill assistance

The Washington Telephone Assistance Program (WTAP) offers the following help for low-income households in Southwest Washington and in the other communities of our state:

- **A waiver of deposit for local service.**
- **A discount on connection fees.**
- **A reduced monthly rate for local telephone service. (On a typical monthly phone bill of \$16, for example, a WTAP customer could pay as little as \$7.50.)**

You must be receiving assistance from the Department of Social and Health Services in order to qualify for participation in the program.

Call your local phone company, or call the Washington Telephone Assistance Program (toll-free) at 1-888-700-8880 for more information.



*We worked with **legislators from all across Washington**, including co-Speaker Frank Chopp, on the floor of the state House of Representatives.*

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